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SOME FRIENDLY  
WORDS.



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By George Bowen  
of Bombay  
Some Friendly Words

*To Hindus, Muhammadans, Parsis, Nominal Christians, and all who have not peace with God.*

—:o:—

YOU have been sometimes told that certainty in religion, if attainable at all, is only reached after a very thorough examination of the different systems of religion. You know that a great deal has been said against Christianity, and many works have been written on the evidences; much time and careful thought will be necessary in order to feel that you have mastered this subject. But that is only one religion; and there are some religions that profess to have so vast a collection of sacred books that a lifetime would be needed to become well acquainted with them. If one were guaranteed an existence like that of the Antediluvians, if several centuries of life were secured to one, then he might hope to get a

sufficient acquaintance with the various religions of earth to justify him in deciding which was worthy of his attention. Only there would still be the possibility that new religions might spring up before he had mastered the old ; nor could he be sure that there was not in some quarter of the globe an unknown religion more worthy of his attention than all the rest. Further, there is this difficulty, that men in general have no taste for prolonged earnest investigation. Again, the reflection arises that Divine providence would not have placed anything that was really necessary to the salvation of men, so far beyond the reach of common men. There is the strongest presumption that the truth upon which the abiding happiness of men generally shall depend, will be presented in a way easily laid hold of by dying sinners. I may die before another sun rises to bless the world ; the salvation that I need is something immediately available.

Now the Gospel of Christ differs from all other systems by professing to be immediately realizable. The Apostles went forth

into all the world ; they preached to Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Barbarians ; and we find in the Acts of the Apostles that men in the very hearing of the Gospel, got assurance of its being from God, at once availed themselves of it, and immediately stood forth as witnesses of its genuineness and preciousness.

This is the grand distinction of the Gospel, that it announces a gift of God to every man ; a free gift of God to every sinful man who will receive it, a free gift of eternal life to every believer. The wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. A man is in the bazaar making purchases ; one man offers him his wares at one price, another at another ; but when a person appears with a gift and presses upon his acceptance what more than meets all his demands, the various vendors may stand aside. The Gospel means glad tidings ; it is the announcement of happiness unbought ; eternal life ; deliverance from sin and the curse of sin ; offered to all alike. The reflection at once arises : This is a

reality or a fiction ; the gift is what it professes to be, or it is a shadow that will leave me just as poor when I have clutched it as I was before ; I prove it then by taking it. In this respect it meets the demands of my nature ; I may die before nightfall, I want a salvation that can be had before nightfall.

But sometimes the very fact that a gift is a gift makes us suspicious of it. It may be like the Greek horse offered to the Trojans, hiding a cohort of armed men within its wooden sides. Why should salvation be a gift ?

In the very nature of the case it must be. Salvation is for the lost ; for those who have fallen by transgression ; for law breakers and rebels. What should we think of a kingdom where mutineers could purchase pardon ? Man owes the utmost service he can render to God, to-day and every day ; there is no virtue in this to purchase pardons for past delinquencies. The crowning aggravation in rebellion is when the rebel considers that everything less than some outrageous atrocity is loyal-

ty ; when he asks a reward for not having struck off the head of some noble captive to-day, or for not having burnt up a village yesterday. This is virtually what all sinners are doing who claim that they are not lost through sin.

This is, we acknowledge, the bitter element of the Gospel. It strips man of those miserable rags of his own righteousness to which he cleaves so tenaciously. Of course ; how can it invest him with the fine and lustrous linen of heaven's righteousness, unless it take these rags from him ? But oh ! my friend, does not your own heart tell you that you can only satisfy yourself with these rags by abiding in the dark ? You must some day come into the light. What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear the Lord thy God and serve him with all thy heart and walk in all his ways, and love him with all thy heart and with all thy soul ? What but this ? and nothing less than this. Thou art therefore, whoever thou art, under the curse of the law that thou hast broken. Thou canst break it ; the feeblest and

most contemptible of moral agents in the universe can break it; but there never has existed that creature that has power to heal the law once broken. Salvation therefore must be a gift.

But perhaps the gift of which the Gospel speaks is not a gift now to be grasped, but only the subject of promise. The life that it offers is something to be realized when this present life is done with. And so after all the thing resolves itself into a matter of comparative credibility. Promises! the world is full of them; what we want is to escape from the nebulous region of doubt and fear and hope into a region of actualities. Well, this is the very thing the Gospel accomplishes for you. Look through the Acts of the Apostles; you see one after another believing on Jesus Christ, and immediately getting that which fills him with joy and peace, and compensates him for the loss of all earthly goods, and enables him to suffer cheerfully the bitterest persecution. He that believeth hath eternal life. The gift of God is eternal life.



I have said that the grand distinction of the Gospel is that it is the offer of a divine gift to every sinner, the gift of life, that is, the free, unmerited favour of God. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." This salvation, we have said, is immediately realizable. We deny the necessity of any long research into the comparative evidence of the different religions of men, when a man is once awakened to the evil of sin and earnestly desires to be conformed to the will of his Creator. In this state of mind he will see that the Gospel has a claim upon his attention that nothing else has, seeing that it alone professes to offer salvation to all sinners, a salvation already purchased and paid for on the cross, and that the salvation it offers is not merely pardon or hope, but present power to overcome sin. The grand point is this, that the salvation offered is immediately realizable. Multitudes of persons, in the very hour they first became acquainted with it, have laid hold upon it and have found in their hands, not a shadow but a substance, a

glorious reality ; and throughout the remainder of their lives have given unimpeachable evidence of the marvellous change wrought on them by the grace which thus reached them. If in a time of famine it should be reported that a perpetual feast was spread in a gentleman's house, free to all comers, and some were doubting if it were really so or not, a hungry man would think it the wisest course to ascertain by actual experiment if such a feast were provided or not, and would repair to the house of the said gentleman and apply for admission. If the door flew open, and he entered and sat down and ate heartily, it would be difficult to make him doubt whether the report was true or not. He would know it to be true, having the testimony in himself. The Gospel, in like manner, undertakes that every one who truly and sincerely receives Christ as his salvation, shall have the inward testimony of his salvation. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself. And this is the witness, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in

his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Jesus said to the women by the well of Sychar: "Ask of me and I will give thee living water, that shall be in thee a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life." And the woman asked and obtained, and that very day she testifies to the town's people of what she has received, and they too believe. 'I will give you rest; ye shall find rest unto your souls.' On the day of Pentecost, when the hearers of Peter ask him what they shall do, he says: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." This gift is spoken of as the firstfruits, the earnest. The Holy Ghost is God the Spirit; and the great promise, constituting the charter of the present dispensation, is that every one who truly believes on the Lord Jesus shall receive from God the glorious beginning of salvation, a sufficient pledge that the remainder shall in due time be bestowed.

He that believeth hath the witness in himself, and this witness is the Holy Spirit.

- > This doctrine of the Spirit of God given to all who believe on Jesus Christ, has no parallel in any other religion. What is the significance of it? It means that man,
- > trusting to the guidance of his own spirit, has gone utterly astray, and must go to
- > perdition, unless a power greater than his
- > own be introduced into his being, making
- > the Divine will superior to his own and
- > bringing to his ruined nature all the help
- > needed for its recovery.

Now here is a promise, a covenant, and engagement professedly from God, laid before thee, oh sinner, and its tenor is this: "Thou hast sinned, and thou hast no power to repair thy sin; but the Son of God has made a propitiation for thy sins, through his blood; I offer thee salvation in Christ; receive him as thy Saviour and thy Lord, and I will give thee the Holy Spirit to dwell in thee; he will show thee thy sins forgiven, will give thee joy and peace, will change thy heart, and will give thee victory over sin and temptation. In

the consciousness of new affections, new powers, a new will, thou shalt know assuredly that I have accepted thee for Christ's sake." And when shall this promise be fulfilled? Immediately; God delighteth in mercy, and the moment you make it possible for his mercy to come to you, by an unreserved surrender of yourself to Christ, and a hearty appropriation of him, it will come. God will not keep you waiting; and you must not keep him waiting.

According to your faith shall it be unto you. How many nominal Christians there are who continue ignorant of the fact that God has promised any such recognition to those who submit to him, and think that no man can know he is saved till he has departed from this world! But is it not written on every page of the New Testament that the Holy Spirit is given to the believer? and is there so little difference between man's shattered and polluted spirit and the Spirit of God, God the Spirit, that a believer can remain in any doubt as to whether he is led by the one or by the other?

The thing is preposterous and incredible.  
 > We therefore affectionately impress upon  
 > you the principle, *According to your faith*  
 > *shall it be unto you.* Who is there that  
 > is not conscious that the purification of his  
 > heart demands a power greater than his  
 > own, a divine power, even the presence of  
 > God the Spirit? We confidently affirm  
 that in your heart there is, if you will  
 listen to it, a response to the divine invita-  
 tion and the divine offer of help this day  
made to you, in the name of Jesus Christ.  
 Through him there is to you the offer of  
 eternal life, and from no other quarter  
 comes such an offer. You have then an  
 ample warrant for that act of faith which  
 we ask of you.

Fifteen centuries before Jesus came into  
 the world, the camp of the Israelites was  
 thrown into great commotion by an irrup-  
 tion of fiery serpents whose sting was death.  
 God was pleased to indicate to Moses a  
 means of deliverance: a brazen serpent was  
 made and elevated upon a pole, and all  
 that were bitten were commanded to *look*  
 to this serpent of brass and be healed.

They obeyed; the poison of death had begun to circulate in their veins, and it seemed all but incredible that they could be healed, especially in such an unheard-of way as that; but it was a very simple thing to look, and they looked, and straightway they were healed; the poison was gone; health reigned once more in their system. It was simply a look! a look in faith, in hope, in expectation; and they were immediately healed. When Jesus, fifteen centuries later, was speaking with Nicodemus regarding the way of salvation, he said, As Moses lifted up the serpent on the pole, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on him may have everlasting life. The faith here corresponds to the look in the first account; it is the look of faith. The type is explained by the antitype: it was a foreshadowing of the way of salvation through Christ crucified; he was in the likeness of sinful flesh, though without sin; so the object raised on the pole by Moses and placed conspicuously where all might see it, was in the likeness of that which

was destroying the Israelites, in the similitude of a serpent, though not itself a serpent. Go preach the Gospel, the glad tidings, to every creature, said Christ; he that believeth shall be saved; the glance of faith, the simple act of trust shall save him. As many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God; but the act of reception is instantaneous. The word of God is the word of life; and the reception of this by faith is represented as the reception of that which is promised in it, salvation: the word is nigh thee, even in thy heart and in thy mouth; that if thou wilt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. "Born again of the incorruptible seed, the word of God." It is then a matter of reception, not a matter of attainment. Men ordinarily insist upon regarding the knowledge of God as a thing of attainment, something that their own faculties must go after and lay hold upon and bring home. But what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man



that is in him ? Even so knoweth no man the things of God but the Spirit of God. The knowledge of God is not then a matter of attainment but of reception. God gives his Spirit to those who abandon confidence in their own powers and virtues, and ask him for his Spirit. The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. If then it is a matter of reception, and if God is willing to bestow it, what shall hinder your having it, when you are willing ? He that caused light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Thousands, tens of thousands, are bearing this testimony ; declaring by their consecrated lives, their altered characters, their peace and joy, and patience and love, that Jesus is even now their Saviour, and that when they submitted to him, they passed from death into life.

But must there not be a sense of need, before the heart can thus be expected to look to the crucified One ? And is there not a sense of need ? Do you not know

in your inmost heart that there is no such thing as acquaintance between you and God? that sin is in you and refuses to be banished? that you have not the peace of God? Is there not self-condemnation in your heart? the consciousness that love to God is not supreme in you? With regard to the future, do you not feel as though you were going forward in the dark? As regards your moral and spiritual nature do you not know perfectly well that it is diseased, and that healing is necessary?

Among those whom I address there are multitudes who, if they will listen to the testimony of their inmost heart, their profoundest convictions, will be constrained to avow that they need such a salvation as Christ offers, and to acknowledge that none besides Christ has such a salvation to offer. They have evidence sufficient to justify the step which the Gospel bids them take; and it is simply because they shrink from some of the consequences that appear to be involved in such a step, that they persuade themselves they need more evidence, and so they wait and wait, and

the precious opportunity slips away, drifts away for ever. Truth does not fully reveal herself to us till we embrace her ; wisdom is justified of her children ; the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are revealed to the children of the kingdom. For you, certainly, faith in Christ would be no blind faith ; you are constantly acting, in temporal matters, on far less evidence than is flashed to you from the pages of the Gospel. You know that with regard to your acceptance with God and future blessedness, your faith never yet rested on anything a hundredth part so firm as the basis offered in the crucified and risen Jesus. Let go all beside ; trust solely in him ; and oh how soon will your heart be overflowing with the blissful consciousness that you are in Him that is true, and that eternal life is yours. .

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